

Conventional Soybean Demand May Be Increasing

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

Soybean farmers in Arkansas and other states may be planting more conventional (non-transgenic) varieties in 2009, says Pengyin Chen, who directs the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's soybean breeding program.

Chen and Jeremy Ross, the division's extension soybean specialist, say they have had many more calls than in previous years about conventional varieties.

The Division of Agriculture produces genetically pure "foundation" seed of conventional varieties for sale to seed companies and dealers, who then grow "certified" seed for sale to farmers. Debra Ahrent, who manages the foundation seed program at the division's Rice Research and Extension Center near Stuttgart, said orders for foundation seed of conventional soybean varieties doubled this year compared to last year.

The vast majority of soybeans planted will still be transgenic herbicide-resistant varieties, but demand for conventional varieties may be higher due to three factors, Chen and Ross say.

One reason is lower cost seed compared to transgenic varieties and the right to save seed from conventional varieties developed in public breeding programs conducted by universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Chen said. His breeding program is supported by check-off funds from growers through the Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board.

Farmers must buy new seed each year of transgenic varieties. With public conventional varieties, farmers can save seed from the first year's crop to plant the next year. After two

crops, they should buy new seed to avoid genetic contamination or loss of seed vigor, Chen said.

Another factor is an increase in Roundup-resistant weeds, which means some farmers need additional herbicides with Roundup Ready varieties, Ross said. Weed populations can develop resistance when exposed to the same herbicide over a period of years.

New herbicide chemistry will be available this year with transgenic Liberty Link varieties that are resistant to Ignite herbicide. The Liberty Link system provides a good alternative for fields with Roundup-resistant weeds, Ross said. But only a few Liberty Link varieties are available, and many farmers will wait to see how the system performs for others before trying it, he added.

A third incentive for planting conventional soybeans is a premium of up to \$1 per bushel paid by some buyers who produce non-transgenic soy products. "There will always be a niche for conventional soybeans," Ross said.

Three conventional varieties from the Arkansas breeding program are available. 'Osage,' released as a new variety in 2007, had the highest yield among conventional varieties in 2008 performance tests in Arkansas and Tennessee and tied for highest in Mississippi. The 'Ozark' and 'UA 4805' varieties also perform well under Arkansas growing conditions, Chen said.

The results of 2008 soybean variety performance trials at Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station locations are available online at www.arkansasvarietytesting.com. Printed reports can be ordered at no charge by mail from Agricultural Communications, 110 Agri Building, U of A, Fayetteville 72701, or by phone at 479-575-5647. Δ



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